

MWF testimony on HB 361

My name is Ben Lamb, and I am the Conservation Director for State and National Issues for the Montana Wildlife Federation. MWF is Montana's oldest and largest hunter/angler conservation organization with over 7,500 members and 23 affiliated Rod and Gun Clubs. Today, we stand in opposition to HB 361.

First, I wanted to throw a little light on the number of archery hunters in Montana. With respect to archery tags – Exponential Growth in archery hunters from 2000 to 2010 is what led the commission to adopt these regulations. Crowding issues and increased harvest on bull elk are really what we are talking about. In 2000, 26,000 archery stickers were sold. 2010 saw that number increase to 40,200.

Most archery hunters are only pursuing browtined bull elk. While the overall success rates for archery hunters are lower than rifle hunters, any time you increase the number of people pursuing an animal by 14,000 people, you end up with more dead bulls, which means lowered opportunity in the long run.

This bill is really about whom gets to kill big bull elk. It's not about process and it's not about biology. In fact, biology tells us that in order to reduce elk herds, we shoot more cows. Liberal cow harvest already exists in all of these areas which are over objective. The problem is getting to those cows, and getting enough hunters out in the fields to harvest them.

This bill would drive more elk to private land by increasing the number of hunters on public lands, thereby increasing the number of outfitted clients who get to hunt leased or off limits private lands with substantially less pressure and increasing the scope and breath of depredation issues arising from elk being pushed on to lands where they are not wanted. This bill erases the democratic allocation of the resource, and establishes a management scheme that benefits only a very small portion of the populace.

Furthermore, there already exists a process by which any issues could be addressed. This bill seeks to go around an open and democratic process in favor of a legislative fix to a seasonal regulation. What next? Will the Senate Fish and Game Committee end up setting bag limits on Sage Grouse? Will the Legislature tell Montana's hunters and anglers how many elk we can have?

We urge you to vote no on this bill.

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